

There were four chairs on the porch, each built by hand from cypress wood and mosquito screen with the blood-red nail heads pounded in crooked. I wouldn't have cared if they'd been made of boiled corn, I was just glad to finally be sitting behind a screen because Louisiana was dirty with mosquitos. We sipped off cans of Pearl beer Hess had brought out from the icebox inside.

Hess spoke of his turtling. He spoke of it as a lucrative business, when times were good. But mostly they'd been bad. There was the high water of 2005. Leveled just about everything up to Lydia, Hess said. Rolled right over the bayou and up Weeks Island Road. Fish farms, rice paddies, turtling traps.

Up close, Hess was no lady's man. He was average height and there was nothing wrong in the way he was built. It was just his gnarled chihuahua face that grated. Hess was an ugly man and his ugliness was unadulterated. He was charismatic that way, I suppose. You couldn't stop looking at him.

“Well, we don’t have those problems out where we are,” Candy said at length.

Hess nodded.

“Corpus?”

“Was. Am. Well, the truth is, Gary, I’ve got nothing you’d call a stable domicile at the moment. I guess you remember I’m more of a motel man.”

“Except if it’s a home cooked meal to poach.”

“A nice home cooked meal prepared by a loving hand never kept me away from a dinner table, that’s true.”

“Only thing that ever kept you away from a dinner table was a husband sitting at the head of it,” Hess said.

Candy finished his beer and looked down at Hess’s warped floorboards that Hess had nailed together himself and that were now coming apart on him. “Now what do you think they keep the dogs and roosters around for, Gary?”

Hess looked Candy in the eye. He studied Candy’s face.

Candy said, “We were just passing through and I thought—”

“I’m not unhappy you did. It’s been what? Three, four years since Corpus?”

“You remember that, I bet.”

Hess had one final look at Candy. Then he got up to fetch us another three beers.

When he came back out, he’d only brought two cans and he was already done with one of them. He mashed the aluminum in his right hand against his leg and tossed the can at the corner of his porch in a smooth bowling motion. In his left was an old, snooty shotgun with a humidified double barrel. Both barrels were stuffed with shot.

“You boys sit still for a moment, okay?” Hess drew the second can of beer from his armpit, cracked it one-handed and sat. It was nowhere near nightfall, except out there on the porch you wouldn’t have known it. We sat there until it actually began to get dark.

“Well, what are we going to do now, Gary?”

Hess leveled the shotgun at Candy’s commemorative set.

“We’re going to sit and wait for Big-Assed Brenda.”

EXCERPT FROM DILLO

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